DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 448 372 CG 030 544

AUTHOR	Goldman, Linda
TITLE	Helping the Grieving Child in School. Fastback 460.
INSTITUTION	Phi Delta Kappa Educational Foundation, Bloomington, IN.
ISBN	ISBN-0-87367-660-2
PUB DATE	2000-00-00
NOTE	44p.; Sponsored by the Bernreuter Lecture Fund in School Psychology and the Pennsylvania State University Chapter of Phi Delta Kappa International.
PUB TYPE	Guides - Classroom - Teacher (052)
EDRS PRICE	EDRS Price MF01 Plus Postage. PC Not Available from EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS	Adolescents; Attention Deficit Disorders; Children; Counselor Training; *Curriculum Design; Elementary Secondary Education; Emotional Problems; Emotional Response; *Grief; Intervention; *Lesson Plans; *Self Expression; Violence
IDENTIFIERS	*Traumas

ABSTRACT

This booklet provides short treatment options for educators, counselors and others on grief issues that today's youth often face. Children may encounter the trauma of fatal illness, accidents, suicide, homicide, and terrorism that they experience either directly or indirectly through the media. They can also face abuse, divorce, multiple moves, and numerous other types of trauma. By learning to create classroom lessons that encourage children to talk, write, play, and act out their complex situations and concerns, teachers can help students keep from being distracted and preoccupied by unexpressed feelings and thoughts. The more educators are aware of common signs of grief in children, the better they can develop teachable moments. A description of the grief process is provided along with examples of how children show their grief. Common ways are explained about how grief is manifested in children with Attention Deficit Disorders. Strategies for helping the grieving child, including ways to respond; allowing for expression of emotion; encouraging picture sharing; and providing for reality checks are all described. A list of resources includes the titles of nine books for parents and educators; seven books for young children and five for teenagers; three videotapes; and four articles. (JDM)

Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made
from the original document.

CG

460

FASTBACK

ED 448 372

Helping the Grieving Child

Linda Goldman

CG030544

PHI DELTA KAPPA EDUCATIONAL FOUNDATION

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Linda Goldman

Linda Goldman worked as an elementary teacher and guidance counselor in the public schools for almost twenty years. She is a certified grief therapist and grief educator with a private practice in grief therapy. She also provides grief education training to educators in school systems across the country.

Goldman served as a national Head Start consultant, a panelist in the national teleconference, "When A Parent Dies: How to Help the Child," and was recently named by *Washingtonian* magazine as one of the nation's leading grief therapists. Her books include *Life and Loss* (1994, second edition 2000), *Breaking the Silence* (1996), and *Bart Speaks Out on Suicide* (1998). She has published numerous articles in such journals as *ADEC Forum, Head Start Journal, The Young Child,* and *Kidspeace Healing Magazine.* She currently serves on the board of the Association for Death Education and Counseling.

Linda Goldman may be contacted at the Center for Loss and Grief Therapy, 10400 Connecticut Avenue, Suite 514, Kensington, MD 20895. Telephone (301) 942-6440. Fax (301) 656-4350. E-mail: *lgold@erols.com.* Website: *www.erols.com/lgold.*

The author dedicates this fastback to all of the grieving children in our schools today and the educators who work with them.

Series Editor, Donovan R. Walling

Helping the Grieving Child in School

by
Linda Goldman

ISBN 0-87367-660-2
Copyright © 2000 by the Phi Delta Kappa Educational Foundation
Bloomington, Indiana

This fastback is sponsored by the
Bernreuter Lecture Fund
in School Psychology and the
Pennsylvania State University Chapter
of Phi Delta Kappa International,
which made a generous contribution
toward publication costs.

Table of Contents

Introduction 7

Loss, Learning, and Socialization 9

What Is Grief? 11
- How Children Show Grief 12
- A Child's View of Death 14
- Grief and Attention Deficit Disorder 17
- Grief Behaviors Checklist 19

Strategies for Helping the Grieving Child 20
- Memory Work 23
- Responding by Writing 25
- Teachable Moments 28

Creating Grief Awareness 31
- What a Grieving Child Needs 33
- Recommendations 33

Resources 36

Introduction

Children always have had to face the trauma of fatal illnesses and sudden accidents. But today children have an additional source of trauma, the encounters with suicides, homicides, diseases, and terrorism that they must face vicariously through the media.

There are many other traumas that do not involve death, such as abuse, parents' divorce or unemployment, multiple moves, imprisonment of a family member, and family alcohol and drug involvement. These are but a few of the many grief issues with which today's boys and girls must deal.

Viewed from this perspective, grief and loss issues appear to be ubiquitous, rather than isolated instances. The information that follows supports this view. Thus, in order to successfully teach children, educators must understand grief issues and the effect they have on the learning and socialization of students.

Young people naturally will be preoccupied with traumatic events or loss, and in such a state they will not be able to learn normally. But such times also present teachable moments.

Teachers can use these sensitive life issues proactively to enhance children's motivation and capacity to learn

by creating classroom lessons that encourage children to talk, write, play, and act out their complex situations and concerns. Instead of being distracted and preoccupied by unexpressed feelings and thoughts, these students can be actively engaged and can become focused and occupied with educational tasks designed around these difficult issues.

For example, students preoccupied by the tragic events in the Colorado high school shooting incident of 1999 might have been asked to write about a day in the life of a student returning to Columbine High School, rather than, say, to write about a day in the life of a Civil War soldier. In that way, students' preoccupations could have been channeled into productive learning, at the same time allowing for an expression of their concerns about the tragedy.

Connecting school work to real life and creating opportunities to express thoughts and feelings about grief-producing events enriches the education experience while simultaneously lessening anxiety and reducing anger.

The more educators are aware of the common signs of grief in children, the better they can develop those teachable moments. This fastback examines child grief and explores what educators can do to help the grieving child in school.

Loss, Learning, and Socialization

The complex relationship between grief issues, a child's ability to learn, and his or her potential must be addressed by educators in our schools. When it is preoccupied by a loss, a child's mind is not open to learning in the routine sense. Moreover, pent-up anger, sadness, frustration, and loneliness — all associated with grieving — can interfere with healthy social integration. Such feelings can explode outward in anger and violent or antisocial behavior, or they can turn inward toward suicidal ideation and action.

Schools must be safe havens for the grieving child. And that means that children's grief must be viewed as a life process that is approachable through words, activities, and both verbal and nonverbal communication.

Too often adults presume that children are too young to grieve, but this is not the case. A child who knows love is a child who knows loss. Losing a favorite blanket, not getting chosen for the soccer team, being called "stupid" — all produce anguish. But so, too, does finding out that Mom has been killed in a sudden car accident. From kindergarten through 12th grade, grief

and loss issues must be addressed in ways that are developmentally appropriate.

A majority of children will be grieving at several points during childhood. The statistical picture of a "typical" childhood is discouraging:

- By the end of high school, 50% of students experience the divorce of their parents; 20% the death of a parent.
- By age 18, one out of three girls and one out of seven boys will have been sexually abused.
- The average child has watched 8,000 televised murders and 100,000 acts of violence before finishing elementary school.
- Some 3.3 million children in the United States witness domestic violence each year.
- Some 160,000 children in the United States stay home on any given day because they fear being bullied at school.
- One out of six children between the ages of 10 and 16 know someone who has been shot.
- In 1992, 632 children under the age of five were murdered, two-thirds of them by a parent.
- Suicide is the leading cause of death among young people; one young person completes suicide every 90 seconds.
- Ten percent of teenagers polled in Washington, D.C., said they had attempted suicide within the last year.

Recognizing that these statistics translate into real children in real schools is the first step that educators must take in order to help the grieving child.

What Is Grief?

Teachers, counselors, school psychologists and social workers, principals, school nurses, coaches, and cafeteria workers must familiarize themselves with the common grief signals that school children may express. These signals allow professionals in schools to recognize students "crying out for help." Only when the cry for help can be recognized will educators and other school staff be able to intervene.

For example, one of the common signals that a child is grieving is the need to tell his or her story over and over. Mary, a fourth-grader, came to school after the suicide death of her father on Mary's 10th birthday and told her classmates that her father had died. And she told how he had died. For several weeks that followed, Mary continued to mention her father's suicide. Mary's teachers became frustrated and, finally, angry. Mrs. Wells, Mary's homeroom teacher, explained, "We don't know what to do with Mary. She's so manipulative. She continues to talk about her dad killing himself. She is a real problem."

What was Mrs. Wells to do? Was Mary being manipulative? Or was Mary simply behaving as a grieving

child would behave. The school's response must be to create a safe place where Mary can speak of her enormous loss without being judged. Educators can and must develop ways to normalize and discuss subjects related to loss and grief.

How Children Show Grief

The need to retell the tragic event, the traumatic loss, is one signal of grieving. Childhood and adolescence can be turbulent years, even under the best circumstances. But it is not unusual for children to experience the loss of a loved one, and the death of a friend or family member can be unsettling for even the most well-adjusted child.

Intense emotion and intense emotional mood swings also are common signals of grief. They often are unpredictable and can be frightening:

- Kevin was enraged when he heard the doctor say calmly that his friend Tony was dead. "Why couldn't you save him?" Kevin screamed, as he pounded his fist against the wall. His rage at the medical profession for not being able to keep his friend alive was equaled by the tears he shed over the loss for weeks thereafter.
- Amy was driving a car with her best friend, Mary, when a drunk driver lost control and smashed headlong into their car, killing Mary instantly, and leaving Amy with several broken ribs. Amy ran into the street shouting, "She's dead! She's dead! Why her? Why not me?" Guilt at having survived when another person died is a common signal of griev-

ing. Survivor guilt also is common in the aftermath of random violence.

- Jon did not want to talk about his father's death. "My friends will think I'm weird," he said. "They won't understand." Often loss and grief are signaled by feelings of isolation. The common admonitions of "Be strong" and "Guys don't cry" often add to feelings of isolation.
- "I don't see him grieve," 15-year-old Jacob's grandmother said, observing the boy after his mother's death in a car accident. But she also reported that every day after school Jacob took a nap on his mother's bed. Wanting to — needing to — be in contact with a place associated with the person who has been lost is another signal of grieving.

The last instance above also is a good illustration of how some children will avoid open displays of grieving. Children do not want to appear "different" from their peers.

For example, Andy was playing on the school basketball team, and the final tournament was a major event. Most of the moms and dads of the team members came to the game to cheer for their children. Andy scored the final basket that won the victory for his team. Charlie, Andy's coach, ran over to Andy to congratulate him, and all the other boys and their parent's joined in the celebration. "Where's your dad?" Coach Charlie asked. "He's working today, and couldn't come," Andy replied. In fact, Andy's father had died of cancer three months earlier. Andy needed to "save face" by denying his father's death in order to appear "normal."

Other signals that a child is grieving include imitating the behavior of the deceased, wearing clothing or jewelry of the deceased, and speaking of the deceased person in the present tense. Children also may become overly concerned about their own health and safety or that of surviving loved ones.

A Child's View of Death

Jean Piaget's theory of cognitive development includes age-appropriate concepts about children's understandings of death.

Preoperational Stage. Piaget explains that young children between the ages of two and seven are in a preoperational stage of cognitive development. This stage is marked by magical thinking, egocentricity, reversibility, causality. At this age children feel that their words and thoughts can magically cause a person to die.

- Charlie yelled at his older brother, "I hate you! I wish you were dead!" Later, when his brother was killed in a skiing accident, Charlie was haunted by the thought that he had caused his brother's death.
- Heather, a seven-year-old second-grader whose father was murdered in a drive-by shooting, visualized death as reversible and believed that her father was going to come back. She wrote a letter to her father and sent it in the mail to "Heaven." Then she waited, convinced that she had done something to cause her father not to write back. "Is Dad not writing back because I didn't get a good report card?"

14

Concrete Operations Stage. Piaget's stage of concrete operations, roughly ages 8-12, is characterized by children having a more curious and realistic view of time and death. Young people in this stage may want to know the scientific reasons why their loved one died, and they may begin to question their spiritual beliefs.

On one occasion I was talking with 10-year-old Alice, whose father had died of a heart attack when she was six. Alice explained, "My dad picked me up the night he had his heart attack. If he hadn't done that, he wouldn't have died. It's all my fault." When Alice related this story, I was then able to talk to her about the medical facts. Heart attacks are related to being overweight, smoking cigarettes, forgetting to take medicine, and so on. Reality checking helped Alice shed the notion that she was responsible for her father's death.

Formal Operations Stage. Most teenagers view death as something far from them. They tend to be self-absorbed and focused on their present life. But that does not prevent them from feeling in traumatic moments as though words have magical powers. In fact, teenagers often believe themselves to be responsible for tragedies that happen around them.

For example, Ashley and Roxanne were sisters, ages 14 and 17. They got into an argument over a boy named Andrew. Ashley screamed at her sister, "I hate you! I wish you would get killed!" and tore up Roxanne's pictures of Andrew. The next night Roxanne was killed in a car accident. Ashley blamed herself for her sister's death. Moreover, she could not share her feelings with

her parents. Finally, she began to attend a teen grief support group, in which she could finally unburden herself and the twin feelings of guilt and grief.

Ross Gray's study of bereaved teens found:

> Forty percent of the teens questioned report that the "most helpful person" in dealing with their loss was a peer. This was true for teenagers who were involved in support groups and for those who were not. Support group participants in this study were much more likely to report that they felt peers understood them after their loss than did other bereaved teenagers (76% versus 8%). ("The Role of School Counselors with Bereaved Teenagers," *School Counselor 35*, no. 3, 1988, p. 187.)

Among younger children the way in which a death is discussed with them can produce erroneous beliefs that can inhibit the process of grieving. Children take literally much that adults say.

- "Grandpa went to heaven." Sally thought, "Why can't I go, too?"
- "Do you think Dad is watching over me?" asked Margaret. "I hope not. That's too embarrassing."
- "Mom said they put our dog, Ginger, to sleep. Will I die when I go to sleep?" asked four-year-old Sam.
- Five-year-old Adam wondered, "Grandma said God loved Grandpa so much he took him to heaven. Doesn't God love me that much?"

Some erroneous beliefs produce new tragedies. Tanya, a six-year-old, repeatedly was told that her mother, dying of AIDS, would soon "be with the angels." Tanya decided she also wanted to be with her mom and the

angels, and so she walked in front of a moving train. Was it suicide? Or was it a tragically mistaken application of a developmentally appropriate concept for a young child?

Grief and Attention Deficit Disorder

Often, given a hyperconsciousness of special needs in today's schools, grieving children are misdiagnosed as experiencing attention deficit disorder (ADD) or a learning disability when, in fact, they are grieving from a traumatic loss. Hyperactivity, impulsivity, and inability to concentrate are normal grief signals that can be mistaken for symptoms of ADD or a learning disability, as the following story illustrates.

Seven-year-old Sam was a second-grader whose older sister, Sally, was murdered in a drive-by shooting the day before Christmas. When he returned to school after the winter recess, he was subject to restlessness and mood swings that alternated between emotional outbursts and periods of withdrawal. These symptoms lasted several months, accompanied by diminished school performance that continued into third grade, when Sam's teacher told his mother that Sam seemed to be exhibiting behaviors associated with attention deficit disorder. The teacher suggested an evaluation by a pediatrician.

Subsequently, the drug Ritalin was prescribed for Sam to address the ADD symptoms. But Sam continued to have nightmares and to wet the bed, both things that began with his sister's death. He became part of a

learning disabled population within the school, yet his deep grief remained unaddressed.

Finally, Sam was included in a school-based grief therapy group, which he attended with four other children between the ages of six and nine years old. He attended this group, led by his guidance counselor, for several months. The children made memory books, commemorated loved ones, and shared photos and stories. Sam's concentration in school became more focused, and eventually he was taken off of his medication.

It is likely that had Sam been involved in grief therapy early on, the misdiagnosis of ADD could have been avoided.

The Grief Behaviors Checklist on the next page summarizes behaviors that can signal grieving in children.

Grief Behaviors Checklist

The bereaved child may:

- ☐ become the class clown
- ☐ become withdrawn and unsociable
- ☐ wet the bed or have nightmares
- ☐ become restless in staying seated
- ☐ talk out of turn
- ☐ not complete schoolwork
- ☐ have problems listening and staying on task
- ☐ become overly talkative
- ☐ become disorganized
- ☐ show reckless physical action
- ☐ show poor concentration around external stimuli
- ☐ show difficulty in following directions
- ☐ complain of stomachaches or headaches
- ☐ talk of a dead loved one in the present tense
- ☐ imitate the gestures of the person that died
- ☐ idolize the person that died
- ☐ create a personal spiritual belief system
- ☐ worry excessively about personal health and the health of other loved ones
- ☐ worry about death (oneself or a loved one)
- ☐ display regressive behaviors (clingy, babyish, etc.)

Strategies for Helping the Grieving Child

Grieving children must feel that their concerns are heard and understood. Many sensitive issues will arise, and feelings of worry, sadness, rage, terror, shame, abandonment, and self-hatred will emerge. Educators need to create a safe environment to meet the needs of grieving children. That means creating an environment in which the child feels secure and free to express these thoughts and feelings and to be listened to by caring adults.

Grief feelings and thoughts are ever-changing. Ideas and emotions eddy like ocean currents, sometimes inundating the child who is grieving. Emotions can well up suddenly, without warning, overwhelming the grief-stricken child and leaving him or her feeling unprepared for the daily trials of school life. The educator who is aware of this aspect of grieving will be flexible about adherence to school rules and protocols. For example, the teacher should provide the grieving child with a safe place to go outside the classroom when he or she is unexpectedly overwhelmed by emotion, without requiring embarrassing explanations in front of classmates.

20

Just as every child is unique, so too will be the child's experience of grieving. Too often adults attempt to prescribe how children *should* feel, rather than allowing them to feel and then responding to those feelings. An attitude that seems helpful is one that allows the child to be the expert: "Teach me about your grief and I will be with you."

Following are basic strategies that make sense when working with grieving children.

Respond. Laura, a third-grader, expressed great anger at Mrs. James, her teacher, because Mrs. James failed to acknowledge Laura's brother's death. After the first week of school Laura had bravely told Mrs. James that her brother had died of a drug overdose. Mrs. James never responded to her, and Linda waited and waited for a reply. I asked Laura what she wished her teacher would have done.

"I wish my teacher would have said, 'I'm sorry,' and given me a hug, and promised she would be there if I ever needed to talk about my brother or the way he died," said Laura.

The first strategy in working with grieving children is to acknowledge their grief. Educators cannot allow themselves to be struck dumb by the child's revelation that he or she is grieving for whatever reason.

Allow the Expression of Emotions. Expressing previously hidden emotions can help children gain a greater understanding of themselves and allow the adults to be more in touch with what is going on in the grief process. So often children need to tell their story over and over.

21

Using such tools as drawing, writing, role-playing, and reenactment, boys and girls can safely project feelings and thoughts outside of themselves about both their loss and their present life. Very young children may use a sand table or a doll house to reenact a hospital scene, a death, a funeral, or some family event connected with grief and loss.

Encourage Picture Sharing. Sharing pictures of loved ones in order to open a dialogue and allow the expression of memories is an important grief resolution technique. Amanda, a 13-year-old whose mom died of cancer the previous year, decided to enhance her own memories by writing to her mom's friends and relatives, saying, "Please send me a favorite picture or story about my mom. I loved her so much I feel I can never get enough of her. I would love a new picture and story about her so I can learn more and more." Amanda received lots of materials and created a memory book about her mother. (More about memory books later.)

Provide for Reality Checks. Reality checks are important for grieving children. For example, they often become preoccupied with their own health and the health of their loved ones. Providing for reality checks, such as allowing the child to call his or her parent during the school day, allowing visits to the school nurse, or scheduling a physical examination for the child or mom and dad, are important. They help the grieving child to feel safe. For example, Margaret, a nine-year-old, worried a lot about her mother and father after the sudden death of her grandfather. Margaret's mom got a physical check-up,

got a great report, and asked the doctor to write Margaret and tell her about it. The doctor simply wrote:

> Dear Margaret,
> I have just given your mom a complete physical examination and she did very well. She appears to be a healthy mom.
>
> Love,
> Dr. Madden

Margaret couldn't wait to show me the letter. She said it made her so happy to know that the doctor said her mom was okay.

Memory Work

Memory work is used in grief therapy to create a physical way to allow children to share and hold memories. Several types of memory work are common.

Memory boxes are used to hold objects, such as a favorite pin or key chain or pair of glasses, that belonged to someone for whom the child is grieving. The memory box can be decorated with stickers and pictures that remind boys and girls of special things about the person whom they lost. Photo albums titled "My Life," using pictures of the family chosen by the child, can be woven into a story with meaning and used to create dialogue about times spent with a special person.

Memory books are collections of feelings and thoughts expressed through drawing and writing that permit the child to experience memories in a safe way. A memory book can serve as a useful tool to enable the grieving child to tell about his or her loss.

23

Sometimes children can be stimulated to develop a memory book by asking them to think about and respond to such questions as:

- What was your family like before _____ died? What is it like now?
- What is your funniest memory?
- What is one thing you wish you could say?
- What is one thing you wish you could do?
- What is one thing you are sorry for?
- What is your happiest memory?

Eight-year-old Robert created a page in his memory book explaining his feelings after his father died. He drew and wrote about his dad yelling at him to "go to bed." And then he wrote his response: "Help me." Robert used this memory book page as a tool to understand his relationship with his father, discovering the anger and fear he felt toward him before this father was murdered. These unresolved and conflicted feelings had made the grief process difficult. Robert was confused by opposing feelings of love and fear. This page in his memory book helped Robert to discover his hidden feelings and put them in context.

Tommy, on the other hand, was another five-year-old whose memory book revealed the absence of men in his life. When asked to draw his family now, four years after his father's death, he drew his Uncle John in the center of the picture. Tommy's mother was shocked by Uncle John's placement, because Robert hadn't seen his uncle for almost three years. The lack of any significant men in his life since his father's death emerged as a central

issue for Tommy through the use of his memory book. Using this knowledge, we developed a new support group of men, including a Big Brother volunteer, a coach as a mentor for sports activities, and more frequent visits with Uncle John.

Using a tape recorder, incidentally, is a way to make a "talking memory book" that is particularly apt for younger children, but even older students can benefit from this alternative.

Memory collages are another way to capture and share memories. For example, after Sara's best friend died in a car accident, Sara created a five-foot-high memory collage made from photographs, drawings, souvenirs, and stories related to her friend. The collage was allowed to hang on the door of Sara's high school for the remainder of the year.

Memory e-mails are an Internet Age version of memory work. When Roger's classmate Matt was killed in a skiing accident, his classmates developed an e-mail system solely so that Roger could share his memories of Matt with them and vice versa.

Responding by Writing

Memory work can be extended through a variety of writing activities.

Letter writing can allow boys and girls to express unrecognized feelings. Often this form of writing is not like the exchange of e-mail "letters" that I described. Rather, the letter may be used to address feelings arising

25

from a loss. For example, Tara, an eight-year-old whose three grandparents had died, worried excessively about her health and the health of her parents after these deaths. One day she became terrified that her father would get hurt in a car accident and was angry because he did not wear his seatbelt. I suggested that she write him a letter and express her feelings. She did so and even allowed space for him to write back. Letter writing became a proactive way to address her grief issues.

Creative writing also is a way of expressing hidden feelings. Coupled with drawing, such writing can be used to explore emotions and open memories. Grieving children often benefit from being able to write and draw about how they visualize their loved one dying, the hospital or funeral scene, and so on. When 10-year-old Michelle wondered what heaven was like, I suggested that she draw a picture of it and write a story about heaven. Her creative work became a positive vehicle for sharing memories about her dead mother. Michelle wrote:

What Is Heaven?

This is what heaven is to me. It's a beautiful place. Everyone is waiting for a new person, so they can be friends. They are also waiting for their family. They are still having fun. They get to meet all the people they always wanted to meet (like Elvis). There are lots of castles where only the great live, like my Mom. There's all the food you want and all the stuff to do. There's also dancing places, disco. My Mom loved to dance. I think she's dancing in heaven.

26

Animals are always welcome. (My Mom loved animals.) Ask her how Trixie is? That's her dog that died. Tell her I love her.

From Linda Goldman, *Life and Loss: A Guide to Help Grieving Children*, 2nd ed. (Philadelphia: Taylor & Francis, 2000). Used with permission.

Poetry extends the creative writing experience. Christopher, a 10th-grade student, was grieving over the death of four significant individuals in his life. He chose a poetry writing assignment in his English class as a way to express his feelings. Christopher wrote the following poem about his friend Doug:

Doug (1999)

You played a bold game of basketball,
Even though you were dizzy and wanted to fall.
You jumped high and shot well,
Which led us to victory at the sound of the bell.
We slapped five and bragged to the other team,
For the game had ended much like a dream.
We left the building and went to the parking lot,
And found the Caravan in the same spot.
We pulled out of the school and rolled over a bump,
A few seconds down the road I heard a large thump.
I turned around to see what fell,
And in the dark it was hard to tell.
I soon realized it was Doug draped over the seat.
I held him up and checked his neck for a beat.
He looked through me as if I were a ghost,
He sat in his seat as motionless as a post.
He was a happy kid that didn't deserve to die,
For he was a friend on whom you could always rely.
He lived for soccer and tried his best,
Which is all you can ask from a kid now at rest.

From Linda Goldman, *Life and Loss: A Guide to Help Grieving Children*, 2nd ed. (Philadelphia: Taylor & Francis, 2000). Used with permission.

His English teacher responded to Christopher's poems with sensitivity in a note that read:

> These are well-written. I realize that comfort and well-meant words often sound trite, but I offer them anyway. I truly admire your strength. I hope writing these poems was a comfort to you as they were an enjoyment to me.

Sculpting or modeling in clay can be another way for children to express grief feelings. Children from preschool through their teenage years like to pound, knead, and work modeling clay in order to release strong feelings, such as anger. They also can use clay to create three dimensional representations of grief work. For example, young Kyle made an angel out of clay. He told his mom, "This is my brother Andrew. He's an angel now, and he is in heaven with God."

Teachable Moments

While much can be planned in order to work with grieving children, teachable moments often occur spontaneously. Sensitive educators learn how to recognize them by understanding the nature of grief and its expression in children.

For example, when the nation was shocked by the shootings at Columbine High School in Colorado, 13-year-old Jonathan called his mother at work. Upset and scared by the television coverage, he said, "I can't believe this is happening. I'm scared to go to school tomorrow and I don't want to go to high school."

28

Such reactions offer opportunities to address grief issues in school. For example, a teacher might frame a discussion around such questions as:

- Do you feel safe at our school?
- What do you wish we would do to make our school safer?
- What do you think about the incident at Columbine High School?
- Do you feel you understand what happened?
- Is there anything you don't understand?
- Would you like to do something to remember the students that died?

Discussions prompted by loss events — whether immediate, nearby, or conveyed by the media — allow educators to address students' concerns and provide reassurance.

The last discussion question above can lead to any number of activities that address grief issues. Students can:

- Create a ceremony or ritual for the deceased.
- Release a balloon with a special note.
- Light a candle.
- Make a class booklet of memories to give to a bereaved family.
- Bake a class cake or cookies to send to a bereaved family.
- Create a memorial wall or collage with stories and pictures.
- Hold a memorial assembly.

29

- Plant a memory garden.
- Initiate a scholarship fund.
- Establish an ongoing fundraiser, such as a regular bake sale or car wash, to raise funds for a bereaved family or a designated charity.
- Sew a memory quilt.
- Place a memorial page in the school yearbook or newspaper.
- Send flowers.
- Create a play.

All of these activities represent teachable moments in which grief work can be accomplished.

Finally, reading also can be a doorway into a teachable moment. Some titles that come to mind include: *About Dying*, by Sara Bonnett Stein (for ages 3 to 6); *Bart Speaks Out on Suicide*, by Linda Goldman (ages 4 to 10); *When A Pet Dies*, by Fred Rogers (ages 5 to 8); *When Dinosaurs Die*, by Marc Brown (ages 6 to 9); and *Fire in My Heart, Ice in My Veins*, by Enid Traisman (for teenagers). As students read and discuss these books, astute teachers will find subject matter that allows students to grapple with grief issues.

30

Creating Grief Awareness

Every child's grief is unique. Adults need to respect the wisdom of grieving children and allow the children to tell them where they are in their process. Alice may cry immediately after she hears her mom has died, Alex may want to play, Sandy might want to be alone, and Johnny may want to tell his story to friends over and over again.

Too often adults communicate in one way or another that children should "move on" and "get over the loss." Educators, in particular, need to recognize that such messages are inappropriate. In their place, educators need to prepare children to deal with grief, both when children themselves grieve and when others are grieving. To this end, they need to understand that grief work constitutes a continuum from prevention to intervention to postvention.

An example may be helpful: Amy was a third-grader whose mom had died in a car accident when she was in the first grade. Her art class was making Mother's Day gifts, and she was flooded with memories as class mem-

31

bers began talking about their mothers. Children, like adults, never know when they will be hit with these sudden, unexpected "grief bullets" that take them off guard and away from the moment.

Amy burst into tears and ran out of the room. Her teacher, Mr. Barry, ran after her and demanded an explanation. When Amy explained that her mother had died two years ago and it was still painful to remember her, Mr. Barry admonished her: "It's been two years since your mom has died. You need to get over it and move on!"

When I met with Amy, she said she hated Mr. Barry for that. The last thing she wanted to do was forget her mother. She needed concrete ways to remember her. During a grief therapy session that day, Amy wrote a letter to her mother, and we attached it to a balloon.

Had Mr. Barry been more aware of the nature of grief and the stages of grieving, he might have responded with more compassion and understanding to Amy's expression of grief. For example, he might have developed a way for Amy to express her feelings of loss in a positive manner — within a safety net of understanding. He could have invited Amy to create a symbolic Mother's Day card for her mom or allowed her to write a poem or to plant a flower. He might also have opened the assignment to other alternatives that might better respond to needs unexpressed by other children. For example, he might have said, "You can create a Mother's Day card for someone else who is special in your life, a special friend or your grandmother, for instance."

What a Grieving Child Needs

Following are several summary statements that educators must bear in mind about the grieving child's needs:

- The grieving child needs to acknowledge a parent or sibling who has died or departed by using the parent's or sibling's name.
- The grieving child needs to tell his or her story.
- The grieving child needs to project his or her feelings and thoughts about a loss through active memory work.
- The grieving child needs to be allowed to go to a safe place outside the classroom when unexpected, overwhelming feelings arise.
- The grieving child needs access to reality checks that provide assurance and comfort.

Recommendations

With the grieving child's needs in mind, educators can take several positive steps to create awareness and better address those needs.

1. Identify grieving children as children at risk. Develop a conference model for intervention, so that the grieving child's teachers can develop coordinated strategies for assisting the child to work through his or her grief.
2. Distinguish between behaviors associated with grieving and behaviors that signal other concerns, such as attention deficit disorder. Use the Grief

Behaviors Checklist (page 19) as a starting point or use a similar checklist of grief behaviors to identify children who are grieving.

3. Provide a secure environment for the grieving child. Provide inservice training to teachers and others in the school to ensure that the grief felt by children will be understood and the grieving child will be treated with sensitivity and compassion. Establish positive "time out" procedures for children who become overwhelmed by emotion.
4. Create grief awareness in routine class work. Help educators understand how to provide for memory work and how to open up assignments so that they are a better fit for the grieving child. Assignments that revolve around holiday themes, in particular, require sensitivity because holidays often reawaken feelings of loss and grief.
5. Develop an attitude of openness about the subject of grieving. There is a maxim in grief therapy that says, "What is mentionable is manageable." Willingness to address grief issues openly and with thoughtful concern will go a long way toward helping the grieving child in school.
6. Promote nonviolence. Bullying and violent behavior (verbal or physical) exacerbate grief. Schools would do well to foster nonviolence and to teach stress and anger management. Death education curricula and grief s. pport groups extend this emphasis on nonviolence and the preciousness of human life.
7. Build bridges beyond the school. The grieving child can best be assisted through coordinated ef-

forts involving parents, the clergy, social welfare organizations, and others in the school-based effort. Such efforts multiply resources of all types in support of the grieving child.

When teachers, counselors, principals, and children all share ideas and resources, they collectively can lift the isolation and loneliness that all too often are dominant characteristics associated with grieving. Educators who treat grief and loss in positive ways serve as role models for grieving children and, in that way, they help grieving children work through their feelings and regain control of their lives.

Resources

Following are a variety of resources for educators, parents, and children.

Books for Parents and Educators

Cassini, Kathleen, and Rogers, Jacqueline. *Death in the Classroom*. Cincinnati: Griefwork of Cincinnati, 1990.

A teacher's textbook and resource guide that confronts ways to work sensitively with a death in the classroom.

Cunningham, Linda. *TAG Program*. Panorama City, Calif.: Teen Age Grief, 1990.

Teenage grief is a grief support structure for school systems. It is a basic six-week format with specific and valuable techniques to use with teens in a group setting.

Dudley, John. *When Grief Visits School*. Minneapolis: Educational Media Corp., 1995.

School districts are encouraged to use this book to establish and train crisis response teams to prepare for tragedies.

Fitzgerald, Helen. *The Grieving Child*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1992.

A wonderful guide for parents and other caring adults that speaks of children's grief and loss issues in a loving and practical way, with many ideas and techniques to include children in commemorating.

36

Gliko-Braden, Majel. *Grief Comes to Class*. Omaha: Centering Corp., 1992.
A practical book designed to help teachers and parents assist bereaved children.

Goldman, Linda. *Life and Loss: A Guide to Help Grieving Children*. 2nd ed. Philadelphia: Taylor & Francis, 2000.
An excellent resource for working with children dealing with grief. It provides practical information, resources, hands-on activities, a model of a good-bye visit for children, and an annotated bibliography.

Goldman, Linda. *Breaking the Silence: A Guide to Help Children with Complicated Grief: Suicide, Homicide, AIDS, Violence, and Abuse*. Philadelphia: Taylor & Francis, 1996.
A clearly written guide for adults to help children with complicated grief issues. It includes guidelines for educators, national resources, and an annotated bibliography.

Perschy, Mary. *Helping Teens Work Through Grief*. Philadelphia: Taylor & Francis, 1997.
This book is a great support for anyone wanting to provide group activities to help teens deal with grief. It includes ways to work through grief using clay, painting, movement, writing, and music in group and paired activities.

Stevenson, Robert, and Stevenson, Eileen. *Teaching Students About Death*. Philadelphia: Charles Press, 1996.
A comprehensive resource for educators and parents explaining childhood bereavement in the schools.

Books for Young Children

Brown, Laura, and Brown, Marc. *When Dinosaurs Die*. New York: Little, Brown, 1996.
For ages 5-9. A simple and honest book for young children that answers developmentally appropriate questions about death.

Goldman, Linda. *Bart Speaks Out: Breaking the Silence on Suicide*. Los Angeles: WPS, 1998.

For ages 5-10. A useful interactive storybook for young children that provides words to use for the young child to discuss the sensitive topic of suicide.

Heegaard, Marge. *When Someone Very Special Dies*. Minneapolis: Woodland Press, 1988.

For ages 4-7. An excellent workbook for young children that uses artwork and journaling to allow them to understand and express their grief.

Mellonie, B., and Ingpen, R. *Lifetimes: The Beautiful Way to Explain Death to Children*. New York: Bantam, 1983.

For ages 4-10. This book explains the life cycle of plants, animals, and people.

O'Toole, Donna. *Aarvy Aardvark Finds Hope*. Burnsville, N.C.: Mt. Rainbow Publications, 1998.

For ages 5-8. This story about animals presents pain, sadness, and eventual hope after death.

Stein, Sarah. *About Dying*. New York: Walker, 1974.

For ages 3-6. This book contains a simple text and photographs to help the young child understand death and to provide ways to help them participate in commemorating.

Varley, S. *Badger's Parting Gifts*. New York: Morrow, 1984.

For all ages. Badger was a special friend to all the animals. After his death, each friend recalls a special memory of Badger.

Books for Teens

Bode, J. *Death Is Hard to Live With*. New York: Bantam Doubleday Dell, 1993.

Teenagers talk frankly about how they cope with loss.

Dorfman, Elena. *The C-Word*. Portland, Ore.: New Sage Press, 1994.
A book for teenagers and their families coping with cancer and the deaths it may cause.

Gootman, Marilyn. *When a Friend Dies*. Minneapolis: Free Spirit Press, 1994.
A book for teens about grieving and healing. The author uses the words of many teens, affirms their feelings, and presents positive ways of coping with these feelings.

O'Toole, Donna. *Facing Change*. Burnesville, N.C.: Compassion Books, 1995.
The author provides an abundance of information and coping choices to assist the grief process for teens. Practical ways to help normalize grief are included.

Traisman, Enid. *Fire in My Heart, Ice in My Veins*. Omaha: Centering Corp., 1992.
A wonderful book for teenagers to explore thoughts and feelings and record grief memories.

Videotapes

Goldman, Linda. *What Is Grief? A Look at Grief in Children*. Kidspeace, 2000. 1-800-25-PEACE.
A comprehensive look at how children grieve, the common signs of grief, the developmental stages of how children perceive death, and age-appropriate techniques and resources. First of a three-part series.

Goldman, Linda. *The Grieving Child in School*. Kidspeace, 2000.
Practical ways for educators to help the grieving child in school, before, during, and after the crisis.

Goldman, Linda. *Children and Complicated Grief.* Kidspeace, 1999.
The impact of suicide, homicide, AIDS, and violence on kids.

Articles on Children and Grief.

Goldman, Linda. "Children Grieve Too: Lessons in How to Support Children Through a Normal, Healthy Grief Process." *Children and Families: The Magazine of the National Head Start Association* 16 (Spring 1997): 22-31.

Goldman, Linda. "We Can Help Children Grieve: A Child-Oriented Model for Memorializing." *Young Children: The National Association for the Education of Young Children* 51 (September 1996): 69-73.

Goldman, Linda. "The Meltdown Process in Children's Complicated Grief." *The Forum Newsletter: Association for Death Education and Counseling* 22 (May/June 1996): 10-12.

Goldman, Linda. "Helping the Grieving Child in the School." *Healing Magazine* 3 (Spring/Summer 1998): 15-24.

Recent Books Published by the Phi Delta Kappa Educational Foundation

S.A.F.E. Handbook
Michael D. Rowland
Saddle-stitched paperback. $8 (PDK members, $6)
Special Offer: 10 copies for only $56

Planning for Disaster, Second Edition
Harmon A. Baldwin
Saddle-stitched paperback. $8 (PDK members, $6)
Special Offer: 10 copies for only $56

Inclusion: Policy and Practice
Thomas P. Lombardi, ed.
Trade paperback. $13 (PDK members, $9.75)

American Overseas Schools
Robert J. Simpson and Charles R. Duke, eds.
Trade paperback. $22 (PDK members, $16.50)

Getting a Job in Teaching
Joanne C. Wachter
Saddle-stitched paperback. $8 (PDK members, $6)

Use Order Form on Next Page
Or Phone 1-800-766-1156

A processing charge is added to all orders.
Prices are subject to change without notice.

Complete online catalog at http://www.pdkintl.org

Order Form

SHIP TO:	
STREET	
CITY/STATE OR PROVINCE/ZIP OR POSTAL CODE	
DAYTIME PHONE NUMBER	PDK MEMBER ROLL NUMBER

QUANTITY	*TITLE*	*PRICE*

ORDERS MUST INCLUDE PROCESSING CHARGE

Total Merchandise	*Processing Charge*
$3 to $25	$3
$25.01 to $100	$5
Over $100	5% of total

Special shipping available upon request.
Prices subject to change without notice.

SUBTOTAL	
Indiana residents add 5% Sales Tax	
PROCESSING CHARGE	
TOTAL	

☐ Payment Enclosed (check payable to Phi Delta Kappa International)

Bill my ☐ VISA ☐ MasterCard ☐ American Express ☐ Discover

ACCT # _____ DATE _____

EXP DATE ___/___ SIGNATURE _____

Mail or fax your order to: Phi Delta Kappa International,
P.O. Box 789, Bloomington, IN 47402-0789. USA
Fax: (812) 339-0018. Phone: (812) 339-1156

For fastest service, phone 1-800-766-1156 and use your credit card.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Phi Delta Kappa Fastbacks

This series, published each fall and spring, offers short treatments of a variety of topics in education. Each fastback is intended to be a focused, authoritative work on a subject of current interest to educators and other readers. Since the inception of the series in 1972, the fastbacks have proven valuable for individual and group professional development in schools and districts and as readings in undergraduate and graduate teacher preparation classes. More than 450 titles in the series have been published, and more than eight million copies have been disseminated worldwide.

For a current list of available fastbacks and other publications, please contact:

Phi Delta Kappa International
P.O. Box 789
Bloomington, IN 47402-0789 U.S.A.
1-800-766-1156
(812) 339-1156
http://www.pdkintl.org

Bessie F. Gabbard Initiative on Leadership

The Bessie F. Gabbard Initiative on Leadership in Education for the 21st Century, dubbed the 2000-2001 Celebration for short, reaffirms the central importance of the Phi Delta Kappa tenet of leadership. Bessie F. Gabbard, the "First Lady" of PDK and a member and longtime chair of the board of governors of the Phi Delta Kappa Educational Foundation, provided the impetus for this initiative, which will focus the energies of PDK members and staff during the two years of transition to the new millennium. During this 2000-2001 Celebration, special attention will be paid to leaders and leadership in education with a particular focus on PDK's traditional advocacy on behalf of the public schools.

ISBN 0-87367-660-2

The little guy gets a friendly push in this playground scene from October 1923.

Courtesy of the Cleveland Public Library Photograph Collection.